

## **Health Workforce Diversity Network**

### **Background**

- Health disparities are clearly evident in Washington State, with respect to total minority racial and ethnic group mortality rates, as well as infant mortality, diabetes mortality, HIV/AIDS, asthma mortality and other death and illness rates<sup>1</sup>.
- Research demonstrates that minority providers may be more effective in addressing cultural, linguistic and trust issues that exist for many minority patients. Furthermore, health outcomes can be improved when the race and ethnicity of health professionals reflects the populations they serve<sup>1,2</sup>.
- The number and percentage of ethnic and minority health care professionals are seriously underrepresented when compared to the overall population of the State<sup>1</sup>.
- Health professionals from underserved communities, both minority and rural, are five times more likely to return to and serve those communities<sup>3</sup>.
- Studies show that workforce diversity leads to better health status. As the health status improves for the state's racial and ethnic minorities, overall health outcomes for all Washingtonians should also improve.

### **Goals**

The Health Workforce Diversity Network (HWDN) is a broad-based public/private group consisting of representatives from associations of health professionals, hospitals, community clinics, higher education, and public health officials. Under the leadership of Judith Huntington, Executive Director of the Washington State Nurses Association, and Dr. Charles Weatherby, pediatrician and Washington State Medical Association representative, the Health Workforce Diversity Network plans to follow up on the State Board of Health's recommendations in the May 2001 *Final Report on Health Disparities* to:

#### 1. Coordinate efforts to improve health workforce diversity

- Create a clearinghouse for different groups' efforts to diversity the health workforce, housed jointly with the Washington State Medical Association and the Washington State Nursing Association, and linked to the SBOH web site. This clearinghouse might include information on health care workforce resources such as the WSHA report "Who Will Care For You," the latest HECB report on diversity in higher education, and other work.
- Identify additional resources needed, missing areas of work, additional organizations, individuals, collaborations, and partnerships that might improve efforts.

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#### Update:

A clearinghouse site is needed, with links to reports, articles, grant information, cutting edge issues, best practices, local and national organizations. It would provide a contact point and maintain continuity for ongoing workforce diversity efforts.

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<sup>1</sup> Final Report: State Board of Health Priority: Health Disparities. Washington State Board of Health, May 2001.

<sup>2</sup> The Health Care Challenge: Acknowledging Disparity, Confronting Discrimination, and Ensuring Equality, Vol I, The Role of Governmental and Private Health Care Programs and Initiatives. A Report of the United States Commission on Civil Rights, September 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Health Resources and Services Administration, Bureau of Health Professions, Department of Health and Human Services The Secret Ingredient of the National Prevention Agenda: Workforce Development, 2001.

2. A. Enumerate the composition of the health workforce

- Encourage associations of health professionals to collect and disseminate the ethnic and racial composition of their Washington memberships (including physicians, nurses, dentists, pharmacists, mental health workers, health educators, environmental health workers, public health nurses, and others).

✓ Update:

1. The network has recommended that licensing programs collect race and ethnicity data using a voluntary survey sent to the professionals they license.
2. The network has also recommended that all health workforce enumeration efforts collect race and ethnicity data, and follow OFM's race and ethnicity data collection standards.

B. Develop and compile a health workforce diversity report card that assesses the diversity of the health workforce

- The report card should include high school, two - and four-year college graduation rates by race and ethnicity; and professional school enrollment, newly licensed practitioners and total practicing health providers by race and ethnicity.

✓ Update:

A system is needed to track people throughout their education and health careers, in order to assess the health workforce. OSPI has a student identification number project underway.

3. Review, refine, and promote the use of health career development programs

- Identify successful programs or models at early education, middle and high school, and higher education
- What components make them successful? (i.e. recruitment, access, retention, mentoring, and other issues)
- How can we promote these programs?

✓ Update:

The network's Health Career Pathway Committee is developing an online survey of programs that recruit and prepare people for health careers. A primary goal of the survey is to identify gaps in health career pathways by region. Another goal is to facilitate communication among health career programs, to exchange best practices, and improve articulation between programs.

The health career pathway survey is available at <http://sphcm.washington.edu/hwdn/>

4. Pursue public and private funds to expand existing diversity efforts

- What are some funding sources for programs that promote workforce diversity?
- What role should this group play?

✓ Update:

The committee will use information from the health career pathway survey to develop proposals that fund program filling gaps in health career pathways.

For information about the Health Workforce Diversity Network please visit the website at <http://www.doh.wa.gov/sboh/Priorities/disparities/disparities.htm> or please contact Kim Moore at (206) 228-7506 or [kam3303@u.washington.edu](mailto:kam3303@u.washington.edu).